

United We Stand, Divided We Fall: A New Path for the Eastern Partnership

EaP CSF Steering Committee Statement

Brussels, 28th March 2022

The horrors of the war started by Russia against Ukraine have truly shocked the world. The Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum is deeply grateful for the unprecedented act of unity shown by governments, institutions, organisations and entire societies across the globe, who have rallied rapidly to provide assistance to Ukraine and its citizens in the face of untempered aggression in an unjust and bloody war. A war which has already taken thousands of innocent lives and created millions of refugees. Despite this unified front and the assistance to Ukraine and its people already rendered, more needs to be done. **We call on all our partners**, across the international community – governments, businesses, donors, civil society organisations and each and every citizen – **to keep up the momentum and maintain the incredible solidarity with Ukraine that we continue to witness today.**

We call on you to scale up your military and humanitarian support to Ukraine substantially and use all means to stop the war.

Ukraine's fight is not "just theirs". It is a struggle for the rights of ordinary people to live a happy life, it is a fight for freedom, for democracy, for good governance - for all we call Western and European values, against the evils of totalitarianism unleashed in violation of all international rules, conventions and law. This is a war that we will all win or lose together.

We call on you to strengthen bonds with all the countries in our region: Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia are engaged and ready to enter the EU more than they have ever been; while Belarus, Armenia and Azerbaijan should not be left behind. Now there is a case for an even more ambitious Eastern Partnership. Moldova's humanitarian support for Ukrainian refugees, all while the country is also under threat from Russian aggression, has been truly heroic. Belarusian civil society and the citizens of Belarus continue to fight for freedom despite facing brutal suppression at the hands of the Lukashenka regime. Meanwhile, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan have long suffered and been playgrounds for Russian so-called "geopolitical interests", malign influence and security provision blackmail, including military aggression and incessant export of corrupt practices, as the rest of the world just stood and watched or did not pay any attention at all. Our inaction just encouraged Putin. All Europe should keep united in not tolerating the massacre of innocent civilians.

We call on you to maintain and promote our shared values of a free world and liberal order.

We may all become emotionally exhausted as the war intensifies. We may become desensitised and demoralised with each atrocity we witness. This must not happen. The world must not return to business as usual after this war. Before these war crimes are justly prosecuted and punished, before international order is fully restored, the war goes on for all of us. Sanctions must be maintained. Western businesses must shun deals with Russia. We cannot allow ourselves to be tempted into restoring economic ties with a terrorist state that has become an international pariah. There are and will be costs to all of us, but they are worth paying if we want to live with dignity.

We call on you to support countries bordering Ukraine and Belarus.

As the war continues, more refugees will flee to Europe and to Eastern Partnership countries - beyond immediate protection, education, social infrastructure, or healthcare, full integration into our societies must be provided for millions of people in the long run. While an enormous challenge, it is an enormous opportunity too. The millions of strong, intelligent and brave people, who seek our protection now can help us build a brighter and more united EU and Eastern Partnership.

We call on you to rely on us.

Civil society organisations in Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Belarus, Armenia and Azerbaijan have decades of experience in successfully coping with a broad range of threats, some of which the West are only just beginning to understand. The entire region is of critical importance to the EU, with its resources from energy to food that the EU needs when seeking to decouple from the geopolitical vulnerabilities exposed by Russia's criminal war. Together, the EU and the EaP can push forward ambitious goals for Europe's broader integration, from climate and energy, to transport interconnectivity and democratisation, to rule of law and strong, effective institutions. There is still danger for the EU if good governance is not the norm at its borders.

We call on you to take the long, painful but hopeful path to reconstruction with us – in Ukraine and the entire region.

Our members, civil society organisations with unique local knowledge and expertise in fields as diverse as human rights, public administration, elections, environment, energy, economic research, youth, social dialogue, transport are perfectly placed to help build a stronger Eastern Partnership. We also have deep knowledge and understanding of the causes of the current catastrophe on which to build ensuring that this will never happen again.

United we stand, divided we fall: together we must fight for our shared values. Shared values which not even a brutal war can destroy, and when we win, we must rebuild the burnt cities, towns and villages and, together, restore our way of life in freedom, hope and dignity.

Members of the Steering Committee of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum